

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ABUJA 000242

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SUBJECT: NIGERIA: ABUJA'S APPROACH TO THE DROC PEACE PROCESS

REF: 01 ABUJA 2113

Classified by Ambassador Howard F. Jeter. Reasons 1.5 (b) and (d)

¶11. (C) Summary: While cognizant of the complexities in the DROC peace process, the GON nevertheless remains engaged and appears more upbeat than last October when NSA Aliyu Mohammed intimated Nigeria may extract itself from this diplomatic morass(reftel) . However, Abuja did not walk, in part, because it sees its role in the peace workout as evidence of Nigeria's centrality to African diplomacy. The thrust of Nigeria's efforts in DROC have been to cajole the Congolese Big Three -) Kabilia, Bemba and Onusumba -- toward agreement on key issues such as the composition and duration of an interim government, composition of the national army, a cease-fire and the withdrawal of foreign forces from Congolese soil. While supportive of the Inter-Congolese Dialogue (ICD), Abuja's approach indicates that it sees progress in the ICD as dependent on the Big Three reaching a general understanding on these key issues. End summary.

¶12. (C) During a recent meeting with PolCouns, Special Presidential Advisor on Conflict Resolution Ambassador Ralph Uwechue provided an account of the December 7, 2001 meeting of representatives of the Big Three in Abuja. Contrary to public perception, the December meeting was not a product of Abuja's insistence, the affable Uwechue maintained. The meeting came at the Big Three's behest. Further, the December session was actually "chaired" by the UN, with Nigeria simply providing the venue. That the three sides saw Abuja as a neutral site and agreed to meet here reflected the GON's progress in establishing itself as an honest-broker. (Comment: Uwechue likely massaged the truth a bit by stating the GON did nothing to promote the meeting. There had been plenty of GON prodding of the major Congolese factions in the weeks and months before the meeting. Nevertheless, that the three sides all felt relatively comfortable in coming to Abuja is a point well taken. End Comment.) The tripartite meeting resulted in a basic understanding on the procedures, roster of invitees, and to a significant degree, the agenda for the ICD set to resume in Sun City.

¶13. (C) Uwechue mentioned the parties also discussed the vexatious issues of interim government composition and longevity, reconstruction of a national army, and the presence of foreign interlopers on Congolese soil. Uwechue tried to dress this aspect of the meeting as neatly as possible by claiming progress was made because no side rejected the others' recommendations outright. Instead, they all agreed to carry the others' positions back to their principals for further study. Asked whether the lack of acrimony represented actual progress or was just a display of African etiquette not to spark a row when a guest in another's home, Uwechue smiled, then admitted there was substantial distance between the sides on these cardinal political and military issues.

¶14. (C) Nonetheless, Uwechue asserted the December meeting had been a net positive. Before the delegates returned to their respective camps, Obasanjo hosted a dinner. During that event, Obasanjo plied his special brand of diplomacy, imploring each side to bridie personal ambition and animosities in order to embrace compromise in the search for something loftier -) national reconciliation and peace. The evening was pitched with emotion, recalled Uwechue. Delegates from each side, voices crackling with strong emotion, promised to honor the charge President Obasanjo had given.

¶15. (C) Using these examples as a segue, Uwechue extolled the efficacy of Nigerian diplomacy in the Congo. He discussed it as labor intensive and centered on the Big Three. Uwechue stated that, in the context of African diplomacy, building personal relationships was essential to success. If a protagonist considers you a friend he will listen and consider proposals that he would reject if heard from a stranger, claimed Uwechue. Moreover, the Congolese realized that Nigeria had no vested national interests in the Congo

that would pollute its role as a honest-broker in the DROC. Consequently, Uwechue asserted that President Obasanjo had given him the mandate to build close relationships with the Congolese trio. The Special Envoy declared that he speaks to the three, particularly Onusumba and Bemba, regularly by phone. Also, Uwechue recalled making numerous trips to the Congo to see the players. Because of the relationships he and Obasanjo had established with the trio, Uwechue believed that Nigeria could push the sides toward peace, inch by slow inch. However, Uwechue acknowledged this process would be prolonged and time consuming. He predicted progress in increments with little chance of major leaps forward.

16. (C) While defending the focus on faction heads, Uwechue stated that Abuja supported the ICD. Nigeria's efforts should be seen as collaborative with, not undermining the larger deliberative mechanism. However, the reality of power politics must be acknowledged, he stressed. Notwithstanding the numbers that might attend the ICD, the Big Three will primarily determine the success or failure of the peace process in the DROC. If the Big Three agree on an issue, the others will be hard pressed not to acquiesce. If the three major armed groups oppose an idea, there will be little the other groups can do to make the trio reverse course. Having superior numbers of delegates around a conference table does not alter the reality of the power equation on the ground, he proffered.

17. (C) Regarding DROC's interfering neighbors, Uwechue believed that Kagame was the most problematic. Rwanda's role in the Congo was a result of objective security concerns as well as Kagame's increasing ambition. Wanting to be a major regional player, Kagame sought influence beyond Rwanda's borders in any event. The DROC morass, given the FAR/Interahamwe presence, provided ample justification for interference. Under the guise of self-defense, Kagame has sated his ambition by an intervention in DROC that exceeds Rwanda's legitimate security concerns. Because of his appetite for influence, the Rwandan was in no rush to alter the status quo. Uwechue predicted Kagame would lean on his clients, Bemba and Onusumba, to hew a hard-line instead of encouraging them toward compromise.

18. (C) Uwechue felt Uganda's Museveni was less of a problem than the man in Kigali. To a large degree, Museveni's intrusion was derivative of Kagame's. Museveni could not idle and risk being overshadowed by Kagame in the contest for regional influence. In large measure, Museveni remained in DROC to counterbalance his rival in Rwanda. If Kagame can be coaxed to the exit door, Museveni would follow with little difficulty, Uwechue believed. Encouraging the disengagement of both Kagame and Museveni were areas where Nigeria believed the international community could best play a diplomatic role, he stressed.

19. (C) In the lead-up to the Sun City ICD in late January, the Special Advisor held out the possibility of a Big Three meeting hosted by President Obasanjo in Abuja. During a January 11 talk with Emboff, Lt. Col. Idris, Special Assistant to the NSA and Lawal Hamadu of the NSA's Office, confirmed that the GON might call a meeting of the Big Three prior to the scheduled resumption of the ICD in late January.

Hamadu added that the ICD would again feature well over 300 delegates, and that the Mai Mai would attend but would attach itself to a pre-existing ICD delegation and not go to the ICD as a separate delegation. However, he added, that the facilitator was scrambling to find money to pay for conference expenses, such as transportation costs, that the South Africans were not paying. (South Africa will absorb the lodging and associated expenses.) Due to funding questions, Hamadu predicted that commencement of the ICD session in Sun City would be delayed.

Comment

110. (C) While supportive of the ICD, Abuja has focussed on the leaders of the three armed groups. This implies a decision that the ICD, given the financial, logistical, and substantive challenges resulting from its large composition, is an all too unwieldy and infrequent by deliberative mechanism to tackle the most sensitive issues in the peace process. Abuja believes establishing close personal rapport with the three key leaders is the sine qua non to significant progress on a cease-fire, agreement on the transition government and on reconstructing the army. Consequently, Abuja will continue to work the Big Three. Although the Nigerians have not clearly articulated this, they apparently believe this spadework with the Big Three actually complements the ICD by forging progress in areas extremely difficult for the ICD to handle. Under this informal

division of labor, Nigeria seemingly hopes the ICD will not get bogged down in dealing with the "demilitarization" phase of peace and will focus on issues that come up later, such as elections and democratization.

¶11. (C) The danger exists that Nigeria's approach could be perceived as creating a second negotiating track capable of undermining the ICD or, worst, of presenting a potential understanding among the Big Three as a fait accompli to the ICD. While the danger exists, we think believe the Nigerians are cognizant of the potential jeopardy and will take pains to make sure it does not happen.

Jeter